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Bridge to the Islamic World

What the Bosnian Muslims Makes Model-like

German Version

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In discussions about a "European Islam" one often overlooks that there are Muslims from the successor states of Yugoslavia who have age-old experience as Muslims in Europe. What impulses give Bosnian experiences in issues of Muslim dealing with the modern age and the secular state? In what see Bosnian Muslims their contribution to Europe?

Islam in Germany is an immigrant religion and can as such not be understood without relation to the countries of origin of the immigrant Muslims. Mostly we then look in the direction of Turkey, the Arab countries or Iran, although Muslims from the former Yugoslavia are the largest group of Muslims in Switzerland and the second largest group of Muslims in Germany and Austria. The most well-known representative of the Bosnian Islam outside Bosnia, the in 2002 deceased Smail Balic, spoke of the "unknown Bosnia" (Das unbekannte Bosnien. Europas Brücke zur islamischen Welt, Köln 1992 - [*The unknown Bosnia. Europe's bridge to the Islamic world*]).

Also in the discussion about the European Islam the voice of the Balkan Muslims has to a large extent been ignored, although they here have a key function. Recently the awareness has been growing that twelve years after the war it is not only about the question how a lasting peace can be achieved in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also about this small country's contribution to Europe. Thus recently at the initiative of academies, political foundations and ministries several meetings on "Bosnian Islam" took place.

Especially because of the 40-years Austrian period the Bosnian Islam is of special importance and is - not least because of the subsequent linkage of religious and national identity - also politically relevant until today. The awareness of one's own tradition finds in Bosnia expression in the fact that in the Constitution of the Islamic community in Bosnia in 1997 as sources besides Koran and Sunnah also the "Islamic traditions of the Bosnians" and the "requirements of the time" are mentioned (Article 4).

The in the 6th and 7th century Christianized Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1463 became part of the Ottoman Empire and developed there into a multi-religious area after

many residents also for economic and social reasons converted to Islam. In 1878 the Congress of Berlin placed Bosnia-Herzegovina under Habsburg administration and occupation, so that it only formally remained part of the Ottoman Empire. Since the Bosnian Muslims suddenly found themselves under non-Muslim rule they were confronted with a situation that in many respects corresponds to the situation of Muslims in Western Europe today.

In contrast to the Istanbul Shaich ul-Islam, Bosnian scholars, supported by the Egyptian reform theologian Muhammad Rashid Rida, at that time declared themselves against emigration and for the Muslim's obligation to do their service even in a non-Muslim army. Both moulded the path of integration gone by the Bosnian Muslims.

There followed a period of many different reforms that involved a Europeanization and modernization with reference to local traditions (see *Fikret Karcic*, *The Bosniaks and the Challenges of Modernity. Late Ottoman and Habsburg Times*, Sarajevo 1999). The Ottoman Millet system, which granted the religious minorities a high degree of self-government, was, as it were, turned round under the conditions of Christian rule. The Muslim school system continued to exist and was reformed. Islam was structurally brought into line with the church structures [*verkirchlicht*] and got a modern form of organization independent of Istanbul.

At the top was from now on the Rais ul-Ulama ("head of the scholars"), who under Austrian law had the status of an archbishop. He was assisted by a Ruling Council of four and by a Council of scholars organized like a synod. The Scharia courts from the Ottoman period continued to exist and were as state organs incorporated into the Austrian legal system. The Sharia was further applied but only in the area of inheritance and family law. A modernization took place here by establishing with the High Sharia court in Sarajevo a court of appeal, and by giving the cadis, who were from now on appointed by non-Muslim rulers, a modern legal training.

Bosnia Develops into the Most Secularized Federate State of Yugoslavia

In 1908 Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed. In the *Islam Act* of 1912 the recognition of Islam as religious community and the self-government under state supervision were established. Thus a full integration into the Habsburg state took place. But the Habsburg rule ended in 1918, as a result of which Bosnia became part of the South Slavic Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in which the Muslims suffered a loss of social importance. In 1930 the state surveillance of the Islamic administration was strengthened and its autonomy brought to an end for the time being.

A new chapter of changes - comparable with that after 1878 - began after the Second World War. In the since 1945 existing Yugoslav Federation the Scharia courts were abolished, part of the religious foundations as well as religious schools were nationalized, except for the Gazi Husrevbeg-Madrasah in Sarajevo existing without interruption since 1537. The result of all this was that Bosnia developed into the most secularized federate state of Yugoslavia. A growing liberality of the regime, however, made from the seventies an "Islamic revival" possible, which was moulded by a new generation of Muslim intellectuals who had studied at Yugoslav universities or colleges in Islamic countries. During that time many mosques were built and the journalistic activities of the Muslims intensified, particularly by the since 1970 fortnight's published journal "Preprod" ("Renaissance"). In the new constitution of 1974 the Bosnian Muslims were recognized as a separate ethnic group under the name "Muslimani" and could therefore declare themselves as Muslims in the national

sense.

In view of the European reserve the Muslims increasingly turned to Islamic states in the Bosnia War (1992-1995) after the end of Yugoslavia. Since the end of the war the Muslims, who now call themselves Bosnians, are as well as the two other ethnic groups of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbs and Croats, confronted with major challenges: reconstruction of state and civil society, reconciliation between ethnic groups, dealing with growing nationalism and external influences (see HK, September 2005, 423ff.; June 2002, 295ff.).

With the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina the Islamic Community has recovered its freedom. It forms a united Muslim representation beside which no other organizations exist. As such it is in itself pluralistic and includes traditionalistic and modernistic movements as well as Sufis. According to the new Constitution of the Islamic Community of 1997 the term of office of the Rais ul-Ulama, who is seen as a symbol of Islamic unity, is limited to seven years with one-off re-election. The Sabor ("General Assembly") with 83 members is a kind of Parliament that has also elected representatives of the Diaspora from Western Europe, North America and Australia in its ranks. The by the General Assembly elected Rijaset with 15 members is a kind of collective presidency and government. In addition there is, corresponding to the separation of powers, also a constitutional court.

On the different administrative levels, which are organized according to the territorial principle, there are both elected lay councils and a spiritual hierarchy that reaches from imams over chief imams and muftis up to the Rais ul-Ulama who is also called Grand Mufti. According to the Bosnian Law on Religious Freedom from 2004 the Islamic community has a civil-law status; it maintains, however, religious schools, gives religious instruction and cooperates with the state in the area of special pastoral care.

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Looking at the structure and history of the Islamic community in Bosnia, so they present in many ways answers to social changes and to state requirements that were forced on the Muslims from outside (see Fikret Karcic, Administration of Islamic Affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Islamic Studies 38 [1999], 535-561, 554).

Bosnian Theologians Enrich the Debate in Western Europe

These historical developments brought about a new interpretation of Islam, on which the Islamic modernism exercised a great influence. So the Bosnian Grand Mufti Mehmed Dzemaludin Causevic, who held office from 1913 to 1930, was a disciple of the Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh. Today's generation of Bosnian Muslims is moulded by the reform theologian Husein Djozo (1912-1982), whose concern was a contemporary and tradition-critical interpretation of Islam: "Even when it was about the same problem, only at a different time and under different circumstances, there would be two different solutions and applications. It is impossible to give a final concrete solution and to say the final word about whatever problem" (Izabrana djela, volume 1: Islam u vremene, Sarajevo 2006, 358). When today's masterminds of the Bosnian Islam deal with the relationship between Islam and Europe, they more or less fall back on Djozos guiding principle.

The legal scholar and former adviser of the Rais ul-Ulema, Fikret Karcic (born in 1955), takes up the historical developments after 1878 and 1945. He sees the Sharia no longer as a positive law that has to be enforced by the state, but as religious and ethical standards that can be important for the conscience of the individual and the Muslim community. Also legal regulations of the Sharia are ethical and are to be

interpreted by the fundamental norms and objectives of the Sharia (see Applying the Shari'ah in Modern Societies. Main Development and Issues, in Islamic Studies 40 [2001], 207-226). Hence he unambiguously votes with the majority of Bosnian theologians for a secular state that remains neutral to religion, to which such an interpretation of the Sharia is not contradictory. He rejects the re-introduction of the pre-modern Millet system, because as personal law it contradicts today's territorial law and is less than it capable to integrate Muslims into the countries of Europe.

The Koran scientist *Enes Karic* (born in 1958) mediates between classical Islamic writers and modern hermeneutics and speaks of the "multi-interpretability of the Qur'an (Essays [on Behalf] of Bosnia, Sarajevo 1999, 211). The Koran brings about a never completed history of interpretation and represents a universal book; in its interpretation also the experiences of non-Muslims must be taken into account. As in matters of the Koran's interpretation Karic also at the political level takes a personal interest in connecting the Islamic and European identity and in seeing them not as opposites.

Karic's aim is a universal Islam that just does not enhance local traditions such as clothing habits to universal religious identity markers: "'Euro-Islam' was a universally understood Islam that would free the European Muslims from their self-made ghettos and from Islam's ghetto in Western Europe" (Essays on our European Never-Never Land, Sarajevo 2004, 28).

The systematic theologian *Adnan Silajdzic* (born in 1957) takes as his starting-point the current crisis of the Muslim identity. His goal is to combine Islam and Western culture, tradition and renewal by a "synthetic approach" (Muslims in Search of an Identity, Sarajevo 2007, 70). Finally, he regards Islam as the actual creator of social pluralism and sees in the Muslim scholar al-Biruni, who lived in India about the turn of the first millennium, a pioneer of open-minded perception of others. Together with a sharp criticism of Western policy towards the Islamic world he calls on Islam and western world to get closer to each other. Although he argues with Western philosophers and Christian theologians, Silajdzic in his draft puts less stress on secular hermeneutics like Karic but on Islamic traditions. One often gets the impression that Silajdzic more identifies with the Islamic world and so sets off for confrontation with Europe.

The Islamic Faculty in Sarajevo as Model for Western Europe

All three thinkers formulate positions of great significance that could enrich the debate in Western Europe. Unfortunately the works of Bosnian authors are up to now exclusively known to specialists and are to a large extent only available in Bosnian language. Translations into English and German and a greater spread of titles published in Bosnia is therefore an important task for the coming years.

Sarajevo, the religious and cultural centre of Muslims in the Balkans, is often compared with Jerusalem, because there in a small area are churches, mosques and synagogues. Due to its history and aura Sarajevo is predestined increasingly to become a place for the European Muslims' search for identity, and would also suggest itself as suitable place for a year abroad of future religious teachers and imams who study in Germany.

In the tradition of the place in July 2007 the four local religious communities (Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Serbian Orthodox) jointly founded an interreligious institute on the model of church academies.

A 'forge of thought' [*Denkschmiede*] of the Bosnian Islam is the "Faculty of Islamic Studies" in Sarajevo, which was founded in 1977 in connection with the "Islamic revival" (see www.fin.ba). As regards space and ideas it is a continuation of the in 1887 founded and in 1946 by the Communists closed school for Sharia and theology, where Sharia and Austrian law, oriental and western languages and modern humanities and natural sciences were taught. Since 2004 the Faculty has been associated with the University of Sarajevo and so has a unique character in Europe. At present about 380 students are registered there for courses of studies (structured according to Bologna criteria) of theology, Islamic religious education and training of imams; - added are students of different correspondence courses.

When you meet members of the faculty staff, who studied at various European and non-European universities, you are impressed by their wide horizon and international experience. Two of the Muslim professors studied Catholic theology in Zagreb and Paris. Apart from the classical Islamic disciplines also English, developmental psychology and comparative religious studies are on the timetable. An anthology of Christian texts serves as textbook with the aim adequately to discern Christian self-portrayals, which were often over-laid with the Qur'anic picture. Lecturers of the Franciscan theological faculty in Sarajevo besides regularly give guest lectures.

Enes Karic, the dean in office until October 2007, pursued a policy of openness and internationalization; his successor *Mehmet Busatlic* would like to continue it. The faculty proved resistant against Wahhabit attempts to exert influence. In the meantime partnerships exists with Erfurt and Tübingen, which in future will make it possible for students from Germany to become acquainted with the Bosnian Islam. An English-language study programme is in preparation. Besides Bosnian English is by now scientific language for Bosnian theologians and no longer Turkish and German. But also the learning of the German language is promoted at the faculty.

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Fortunately now *Dzevad Hodzic*, lecturer in ethics at the faculty, as the first Bosnian theologian participates in the German Research Network "Theological Forum Christianity - Islam" (see his article: *Muslimische Auffassungen der Geschichte des Islam und die Erfahrung des Leids*, in: *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit? Leid und Leidbewältigung in Christentum und Islam*, Regensburg 2008, 112-118 [*Muslim views on the history of Islam and the Experience of Suffering*, in: *Test or Price of Freedom? Suffering and Coping with It in Christianity and Islam*]).

The Church-similar Structure of Islam in Bosnia finds its Continuation in Germany

The Diaspora of the Bosnian Muslims has still little been studied, although every fourth Bosnian lives outside the country. The ignorance of the Bosnian Islam is up to now often accompanied by a disregard of the Bosnian Muslims in Western Europe. In the eighties in Germany Yugoslav cultural associations were established, partly with prayer rooms. With Yugoslavia's disintegration a differentiation in Bosnian and Kosovo Albanian communities took place.

Since 1994 the VIGB (Verband Islamischer Gemeinden der Bosniaken in Deutschland [*Association of Islamic communities of the Bosnians in Germany*]) as umbrella organization of the Bosnian Muslims includes 52 mosque communities. The head office is in the miner city Kamp-Lintfort west of Duisburg. The mosque developed from a dwelling-house is located at the outskirts of the city and is the only Bosnian Diaspora mosque with a minaret outside the former Yugoslavia. Locally the mosque is the well-integrated, but it is out of the way. Hence there are considerations to move to a big city.

The head of the association is since 1994 Mufti *Mustafa Klanco*, who is elected by the General Assembly with delegates of the local communities. Analogous to the eight Mufti districts (Muftiluks) in Bosnia it is a 'foreigner district of the Islamic community in Bosnia' that sends two delegates to the General Assembly in Sarajevo. Germany is in turn subdivided into six regions, each with a Chief Imam. Hence the church-similar structure of Islam in Bosnia is continued in Germany and can be seen on the spot by the fact that Bosnian communities are more than others oriented towards their imams.

The VIGB is a member of the Islamic Council and the Central Council of Muslims in Germany; but there it sees itself only in an observing role and up to now keeps in the background in public. With one person the VIGB is represented in a workgroup of the German Islam Conference. Like other Muslim organizations the VIGB too is only beginning to be present on the Web in German. In November 2007 the VIGB in cooperation with the Academy of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart for the first time organized a public meeting, what can be seen as a step toward greater outward activities.

In many places the Bosnian mosques are of no apparent public importance. But in numerous cases, as e.g. in Cologne, Wiesbaden, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Ulm there are good experiences of cooperation. A church partner of Bosnian Muslims in Mannheim observes that they contribute experiences of interreligious coexistence from Bosnia, and he sharpens his perception: "The Bosnians are really quite different." Who visits Bosnian mosques notes that there on average German is spoken more often and better than in Turkish mosques. Some communities founded by Bosnian Muslims, such as the "Islamic Forum Penzberg" and the "Islamic Community Stuttgart" increasingly address Muslims with offers in German language. This has the consequence that they find resonance with Muslims of most diverse backgrounds, and in future develop to multi-ethnic centres with German as the language of communication.

Elsewhere the Bosnian element is more in the centre. If you take Bosnia itself as model, where after 1878 structures of their own were established and one no longer regarded oneself as Turkish Diaspora, a clear orientation towards the immigration countries suggests itself. At present the Bosnian Muslims are also politically discovered as contacts, so that here in the next years dynamic developments can be expected. From the observable rapprochement between the major Muslim organizations the Bosnian Muslims so far do not benefit, since they feel in the shadow of Turkish associations that, according to their perception, often stay amongst themselves.

The Bosnian Islam has a long experience in contact with Europe and coexistence with Christians. The historical developments have led to "a religious communion that is tolerant, open to dialogue, and committed to western values" (*Thomas Bremer, Kleine Geschichte der Religionen in Jugoslawien, Königreich - Kommunismus - Krieg, Freiburg 2003, 63 [Small History of Religions in Yugoslavia, Kingdom - Communism - War]*). Bosnia is the best proof that there is a European history of Islam and an Islamic history of Europe. The separation of state and religion is for the Bosnian Muslims since 1878 an unquestioned reality. Moreover, they have developed a clear organizational structure that combines synodal and hierarchical elements. Also with regard to the Imam training the Islamic community in Bosnia sets standards. For since 2005 the post as imam requires a completed study of theology, which must, if necessary, be made up for by already working imams.

The present Rais ul-Ulama *Mustafa Cerić*, who has been in office since 1993, propagates the Bosnian organizational model for the whole of Europe and himself has ambitions to become Mufti of the European Muslims.

On the occasion of the celebrations in Sarajevo in July 2007 of the arrival of Islam in Europe 600 years ago he again reminded that there are indigenous Muslims in Europe. In 2006 he formulated a "Declaration of European Muslims" that calls upon the Muslims to live self-critically and ready for dialogue as good citizens of Europe. Conversely, the European Union should open for a lasting and socially visible presence of Muslims.

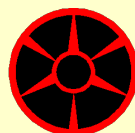
The document contains an unconditional recognition of human rights, democracy and rule of law. But since Cerić sees the Muslims in Europe incorporated by a social contract and demands the recognition of the Islamic family law as in the Austrian time, his position could be misunderstood. Even in his own community Cerić is not undisputed, since he - in accordance with his office - goes a path of compromise between traditionalist and modernist movements.

The contexts are too different for the Bosnian Islam to be directly taken into consideration as a model that provides a concrete way for the Muslims in Western Europe. Some matters may only be of permanence in the specific tradition and situation of Bosnia. But the reforms in the Bosnian Islam are an impressive example of the fact that and how massive processes of change in Islam, which have been caused by new political circumstances, can take place without the price of self-abandonment. Thus institutions and theologies have developed that connect religious and secular affairs, tradition and modernity.

In contrast to Bosnia the Muslims in Western Europe are in a migratory situation and represent a small minority in multi-ethnic composition. Here to realize a uniform institutionalization of Islam after the Bosnian model still needs creativity and persuasion. But with an organization that is built analogously to the Islamic community in Bosnia the Muslims would certainly get a stronger negotiating position opposite the state.

Europe too should use all these resources and not leave Bosnia to its own devices, for the people in Bosnia see themselves on the dark side of Europe. Because of their European history they wish for Europe's interest and signs of belonging to it. The bridge function just described is unique, even if the Bosnian Muslims many times experience how they have fallen between two stools. One often hears from them the sentence: "The Arabs say we are not really Muslims. Europeans say we are no right Europeans." Europe should do everything so that the latter is no longer the case in future.

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